RESEARCH RELATED TO STUDENT VOICE

- **Agency** in a youth development context indicates the ability to exert influence and power in a given situation. It connotes a sense of confidence, a sense of self-worth, and the belief that one can do something, whether contributing to society at large or to a specific situation.

- **Student voice** describes the many ways in which youth might have the opportunity to actively participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers.
  - Consists of the most basic level of youth sharing their opinions of problems and potential solutions OR collaborating with adults to actually address the problems in their schools.
  - **Activities** range from schools gathering information from students through focus groups and surveys to students working alongside teachers to develop and implement strategies for school improvement.
    - Most research has looked at efforts to increase student voice and agency at the **classroom** level. These studies have found that students improved academically when teachers constructed their classrooms in ways that value student voice - especially when students are given the power to work with their teachers to improve curriculum and instruction.
  - **Benefits** include the development of new skills and a more positive outlook on their school and their lives overall, helps to improve teaching, curriculum, and teacher-student relationships, leads to changes in student assessment, and a strong increase in agency, belonging, and competence across the youth participating in student voice efforts.
    - The Manitoba School Improvement program found a correlation between an increase in student voice in the school culture and an increase in school attachment.

“The most effective strategies have to do with treating students as capable persons, capitalizing on their knowledge and interests and involving [students] in determining goals and methods of learning” (Ben Levin, 1994).


